



Director of
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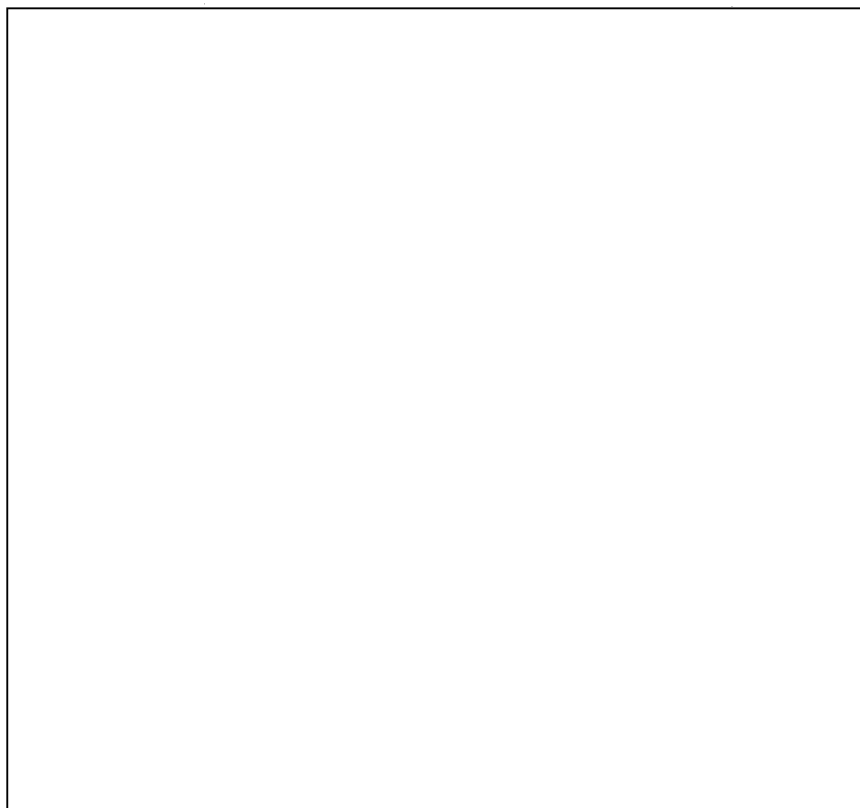
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Iran-Iraq: The Next Iranian Offensive

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Special Analysis

IRAN-IRAQ:

The Next Iranian Offensive

Iranian preparations for an attack on the Al Basrah front should be complete this weekend, but major flooding north of Al Basrah could force Tehran to postpone its main offensive again. Despite the flooding, Iran probably will launch attacks west and south from the Majnoon Islands in the next few weeks. The Iraqis are likely to respond by increasing their air and naval attacks against shipping in the Gulf. Tehran does not appear to have taken any measures to close the Strait of Hormuz, but it could decide to launch raids against Kuwait in retaliation for its support of the Iraqis.

Five Iranian Army divisions with 100,000 troops are near Al Basrah, and 100,000 to 300,000 Revolutionary Guards and militia also may be in the area. Since January, Iran has been conducting large-scale callups of irregulars.

Iran has approximately 600 armored vehicles, or about one-third of its remaining inventory, and 200 artillery pieces concentrated mostly northwest of Al Basrah near the Majnoon Islands.

The Iranians probably have several thousand troops on the Majnoon Islands and have been using a one-lane, 16-kilometer pontoon bridge, helicopters, hundreds of boats and barges, and a few hovercraft to supply them.

This buildup around Al Basrah has been hampered by inadequate logistic support, but there are signs Iran may be completing its preparations.

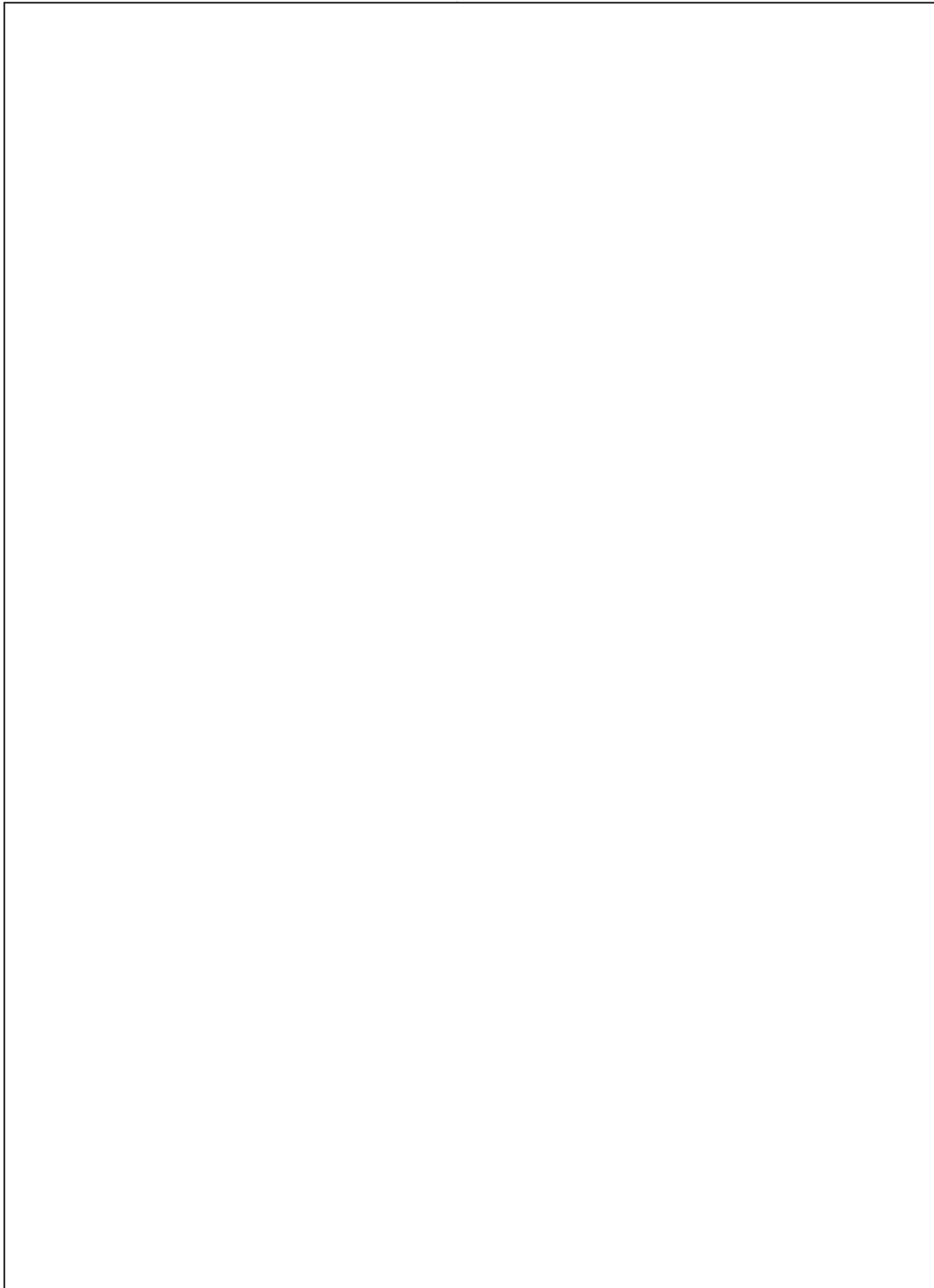
Iraqi Defenses

Iraq has at least 10 reinforced divisions with as many as 200,000 troops defending Al Basrah. These units are equipped with about

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2,500 armored vehicles and 550 artillery pieces. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Iraqis are dug in behind extensive fortifications east and north of the city. In the area west of the Majnoon Islands, however, they have only one infantry division. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Senior officers in the Iraqi Air Force are less concerned with effective airstrikes than with impressing political leaders with high sortie rates. In past battles, however, the Air Force has fought more effectively once Iranian troops have left their trenches and attacked. [REDACTED]

Central and Northern Border Areas

[REDACTED]

The Iraqis are aware that the main concentration of Iranian forces is opposite Al Basrah, and they believe that attacks elsewhere will be diversionary. Nonetheless, Iraq has between nine and 13 divisions along the border on other fronts. Some of these units could be used to reinforce Al Basrah, once the offensive is launched. [REDACTED]

The War in the Gulf

Iraq claims to have attacked 10 ships and a pumping station in three raids in the Persian Gulf since 24 March. [REDACTED]

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Baghdad's claims that its Super Etendard fighter aircraft were used to attack targets in the Gulf probably are designed to put more pressure on Iran. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Outlook

The recent flooding in the area where the Iranians have concentrated their men and armor may force Iranian commanders to postpone their major attack. Iran probably hopes eventually to use 100,000 to 200,000 troops in an attempt to split Iraqi forces in the Al Basrah area by seizing the bridges across the Tigris River. [REDACTED]

The Iranians could use boats to launch smaller attacks from the Majnoon Islands in another bid to block the road between Baghdad and Al Basrah. They are likely to have enough pontoon sections to build a bridge to the western shore of the marshes, once an assault force of a few thousand men has established a bridgehead. Light artillery and antitank weapons would then be moved across the bridge to defend against counterattacks. [REDACTED]

The Iraqis probably would be able to repel a major offensive to the north and east of Al Basrah. They have had difficulty fighting in the swamps, however, and they failed to recapture the Majnoon Islands. Although they have strengthened their forces in the marsh area since February, they could have problems defending against another Iranian attack in this area. [REDACTED]

At the same time, the Iraqis appear to be trying to put more pressure on Iran by increasing the frequency of raids and widening their areas of operations in the Gulf. The Iraqis would be likely to attack Khark Island only if the Iranian offensive were succeeding or, over the longer term, if their sporadic attacks in the Gulf failed to deter shipping bound for Iran. [REDACTED]

Tehran so far does not appear to have taken any steps to prepare for closing the Strait of Hormuz. Kuwait, however, is highly vulnerable to air attacks by Iranian aircraft based at Bushehr. Tehran may decide on such a raid to punish Kuwait for its increasing support to Baghdad and to discourage other Arab states in the region from aiding Iraq. [REDACTED]

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